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THE COUNTRY DOCTOR.

An Address delivered before the Central Kentucky
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BY STEELE BAILEY, M.D.
President.

Gentlemen: I will not attempt this morning an elaborate address, because I do not want to infringe upon good nature by disturbing its equilibrium, or give "airy nothings a local habitation and a name." I bear in mind fully Chomel's first law in therapeutics, which is, to do no harm; the second rule is, to do good. If I were trained in the accomplishment of writing, it would be a pleasure indefinable to give you a general survey of the position occupied by medicine as a branch of human knowledge at the present time in relation to other branches of knowledge; but I am not. Besides, it has been wisely said that one chief art in a president's address is to advance no serious opinions and to provoke no criticisms. I shall, at a venture, talk about him for whom I entertain very kind feelings; he is a part of the body politic, cosmopolitan are his habits, a necessity in every enlightened community, and will so continue until the medical mills cease their grinding; which happy event is to occur when chaos shall come again. I refer to "*The Country Doctor.*"

In considering, seriatim, this specimen of the genus homo, shall I be serious or shall I handle him with a tender kid-glove care, allowing you to remark, if I am particularly dull, that there is a design under it. Young doctors, and some middle-aged unmarried fellows too, for that matter, understand there are circumstances under which it would be a breach of good manners not to indulge in a little flirtation. A human being has such a variety of strong feelings in a state of so-

lution that any object will be sufficient to determine their crystallization. "We have all a vast amount of disposable emotion: we all long to admire and be admired; we are grateful for compliments; we want our sentiments to be confirmed by sympathy, and therefore, when an accident has drawn the sluices, a whole torrent of emotions rushes into the channel provided for it." Angels and ministers of grace, however, will defend me from coquetting with this coterie of medical gentlemen, who vary in age from the gray-haired veteran, upon whom Time, the thief, is stealing (but let us hope that age will not wither nor custom stale his infinite variety), to the young man who is radiant, daffly enthusiastic, and who is, as Burns says, "Blithe, fou, and unco happy." To trifle would be unbecoming, undignified, and have neither pleasure nor sense in it. These things being true, I will not shiver longer on the brink, but present to you at once, and as he is, the typical *country doctor*.

To define him: The country doctor is generally understood to be a personage who has a rational appetite, which moves him to do good, or to do bad—to do good the public commonly expects. It is also expected that he will seek no revenge, or be mindful of wrong; that he will bring home his brother's ox if he go astray, as it is commanded; that he will give to him that asketh, and not turn from him that borroweth; that he will bless them that curse him; love his enemy; make himself equal to them of the lower sort; rejoice with them that rejoice, weep with them that weep; speak truth to his neighbor, be courteous and tender hearted, be hospitable and, withal, *dispense the necessities* to the saints. Pegasus must show the stuff that is in him by pulling a cart as well as in any other way.

If to fulfill these expectations be not in him naturally, it must be acquired, that he may be on terms of good will with the pop-

ulace, without reckoning once that he has an existence to support. The "fresh" country doctor is regarded as one freighted with philanthropy; he is expected to work from early morn till dewy eve, dispense charity in every quarter—and to charge would be mercenary and base; only *fiddlers play for reward*. At the tip of his career, if he is impecunious—and ninety in a hundred are in this calamitous condition, believing the illusion that medicine is a profitable investment—and he casts his lines among a strange people, he will oftener than not meet men who seem impressively clever, who will proffer him that of which they have most to dispose, not silver and gold by any means, but *good advice*.

They always begin: Be charitable to the poor, never refuse a call to white or black for the sake of experience; they suggest with whom he must curry favor; he must be moral, industrious, agreeable, social, attend church, and from this consecrated house "play the phantom," if it needs be, to win, and in this way work from the hovel in the knobs to the man who has cattle on a half dozen hills. Indiscriminate advice to a sensitive man is, like indiscriminate alms-giving, disgusting; but our subject is inexperienced, timid, and Hope, the anchor of the soul, bids him do nothing rashly. He plods along quietly yet actively, and alive to the exigencies of life, and very thankful for small favors. He lives stingily, the fees come in slowly, and his landlord, who supplied the inner man for several months maybe, becomes importunate. Then it will be that Esculapius will rise in the morning but little refreshed by the chief nourisher in life's feast; matters look gloomy, but he thinks, philosophically, "Into each life some rain must fall, some days be dark and dreary;" the creditor is appeased—the toiler is ready to fight his battles, he believes in himself and that a good day is coming. Regardless of minor interruptions, he is stimulated by an ardent desire to forward the improvement of his profession: he devotes to study every hour he can spare from his daily vocations or snatch from the time allotted others to sleep, and to advance this end he is as ready as was John Hunter to sacrifice the claims of worldly prudence and self-interest. . . .

It must be agreed that, of all men, the country doctor does the most wearing work, his mode of life is at high pressure. He is exposed to the inclemency of every weather, to the cold blasts and rain of winter, to the shimmering heat and dust of summer; in sunshine and in shadow he must go. The

holy hour of midnight often catches him on the road, going forth as the good Samaritan, and, forgetful of self, he hastens that he may relieve some poor soul of an inward grief or peristaltic woe. "The portals of the contagious chamber which none dare enter are passed by him without a moment's hesitation; and fortunate is he who goes through life without disease directly incurred in his line of duty." Yet, as he passes along, he is slowly gathering about him that bitter lore of life, experience, which shows him the futility of tricks of semi-professional tactics; which tells him how careful he must be in his ministrations to the sick; how chary, as wise as a serpent and as guileless as a dove. His developed condition, the sense of the innate, tells him to appreciate the endearing elegance of female friendship, to exercise that tact which beats genius, to agree in many things with the old ladies, and be cheek by jowl with that *influential but ancient miss*, whose poor sad heart may yet be dreaming.

Under certain circumstances, and with some pretty good people, he must not be bold enough to assert that a roasted mouse is not a sovereign cure for gun-shot wounds, that cobwebs boiled with the chamomile are silly things for an indigestion, and that nobody had ever been cured of jaundice by swallowing the yolk of an egg with a flea in it, for fear that he may be accused of heresies which would subject him to bitter assaults. On occasions he must have nothing original about him, "except original sin." What a character he is! how sweet, how accommodating, how generous!!!

After obeying for a long time the behests of worldly imprudence, by patience, economy, work, flexible hope and good humor, with perhaps a semi-occasional churlish apostrophe after the famous Sam Johnson, that medicine is a melancholy attendance on misery, a mean submission to peevishness, and a continual interruption to pleasure, *Time*, the great *admonisher*, whispers that he is not being requited according to his deserts. Others who commenced life after himself, in other pursuits, are climbing the ladder to competency; can travel, own houses and lands, and dress in purple and fine linen daily. He may not know that crow's feet are multiplying, or his hair frosting, unless his glass is consulted or the fact communicated by some kind friend. His feelings yet are tonic, vigorous, need no constructives; but, in spite of this, the record of the family Bible tells him he is nearing forty, and he

knows there is but little of the *sine qua non* laid up for a rainy day. Amid all discouragements and disappointments, he has performed his whole duty. He has purchased medicines which he has given freely to prince and peasant; he has sacrificed mental labor and time; he has brought many sick back to health; he has preached the gospel of preventive medicine, the gospel of fatness, of temperance and repose; he has done, in a word, every thing which would cause him to be called a good country doctor.

By his pen he has contributed his mite to the progress of his profession, he has watched jealously its interests, he has *charged fees according* to the scale of his worthy neighbor, knowing that downward pecuniary competition in ordinary course of private practice is every where reprobated and condemned. He has tried to be the gentleman, and his conduct taught him that in any community, in this or in any other civilized country, the practitioner of medicine who dares watch at the door of a professional neighbor, and tempts his patients by an offer to practice at lower fees, is at once stricken from the roll of honor and consigned to merited ignominy and disgrace.

Ambitious of attaining a standard of excellence and success in his profession, every instrument of precision has been employed. The clinical thermometer, the microscope, the rhinoscope, the ophthalmoscope, in fact all the "scopes" have contributed to the welfare of the sick placed in his hands; and yet *there is something lacking*. Again, as the panorama of life is unveiled before him, he sees beauty and joy in nature, he feels that this world is a good one to live in; the people are cheerful, sunny-natured, polite, urbane, comparatively prosperous and contented. He himself has had many pleasures, some frolic, and some fun. His social and professional life has manifested itself in many charming ways; his intercourse with congenial persons, the growth and cultivation of their friendship, have been a balsam and a nectar. Another, and not the least of his physical delights, he has ridden the same horse day after day, who is not a slave, but a friend; who has learned his tricks of voice, hand, and heel; who bears his master's infirmities, knowing that his master will bear with his in turn. On his "Rosinante" he built air-castles, revolved his cases, subjected them to treatment, cogitated on his successes and reverses, went over and over again his varied and checkered life experience, and forgot the world while on the friendly,

shady road, and only came to a realization when he bumped against a worldling.

Thus the hours and days were spent, sinning against nobody, because his conscience is void of offense; still he *is n't entirely happy*. Why is n't he? Not that he has remorse over talents wasted and opportunities squandered, or a melancholy sadness that he failed to improve the seed-time and formative periods. By no means. He made others happy, he gave to his clientele his marrow and fatness, he strove above self by good deeds and moral heroism. He willed to achieve success, he accomplished it, and in testimony thereof he is an epistle known and read of all men. His business habits have been methodical and scrupulous as to details. He is rich in experience angels might covet—rich in a faith of the power of medicine that has grown with his years. His hands and heart are clean and pure, and he can say truthfully, the curtains of the land of Midian might tremble, but he did his duty.

While chewing the cud of reflection he finds that life is going as it does with ordinary mortals, with this difference, probably, that he has many *clinging* friends. The children know him familiarly, and are his pets; the women of his clientage treat him with great friendliness and deference; and the men appeal to him when in trouble, whether it be for a furuncle or a fever, or to subscribe to a note (a mere legal formality!) which they may have in bank, and which pleasantly reads, "Four months after date we promise to pay"—who? My family doctor and I. And that legal instrument, instead of increasing his exchequer, sometimes leads to misery and want to the doctor. If he has done all the requirements of a country practice—has been earnest, skillful, judicious, lenient, and accommodating—why has n't he personal bliss? What is the contrary wind preventing his ship from entering the port of contentment? Echo answers, "*Ill requital*." He piped to them, but the dancers were not *always* responsive!!! Hence this wail in zephyrs.

Each gentleman of this Association wears three faces—when first sought, an angel's; and a god's, the cure half wrought; but when that cure is complete, and he seeks his fee, the de'il looks then less terrible than he. Is there a balm in Gilead to remedy this?

"Let doctors, then, of whatever school, Remember to observe this prudent rule: When our tortured patients cry out, 'O dear me!' Then let each say, 'I'll thank you for my fee.'"

But is it money which is the *ultima thule* of the country doctor? I do tacitly answer, yes; without a certain sum to meet the requirements of this utilitarian age, and to put him upon a plane of social equality with the best people—an amount sufficient to give him ease—and that he shall not feel he is bound and compelled to be a daily breadwinner, is necessary, and should be his according to the *quid-pro-quo* law. But alas! alack! by professional work alone how few attain unto the elysium!

In a measure man has the making or unmaking of his own destiny, so far as the interests of this life are concerned. However, the truth dawns that medicine is not a commercial pursuit, and that the "tenderest spot of the American anatomy, the pocket," is reluctantly opened to disembarass one's self of a medical bill.

While his toil and ambition have been equally great, and his pay and dignity equally small, the country doctor continues to work through endemics and epidemics; but year is succeeding year, and time with him is fleeting. He is still a good citizen, and esteemed for his moral worth; his family is highly respected; his boys and girls have grown into honorable men and women, and he himself at his chosen task; yet he feels a limp in his gait and a slowing of his speech, and that medical life is more burdensome the longer the vesture is worn; and the good (?) people, they who have worn him out, and some at whose mother's accouchement he was present, thoughtlessly say, "He is old, only good in obstetrics now, and perhaps a *pretty good baby doctor*."

He is growing old; but is doing so gracefully, peacefully, cheerfully. A little while longer, just a little, Age, the inevitable, plants wrinkles over his visage, the thatch on the top of the roof falls off, the grinders cease because they are few, the windows become darkened, and prop after prop falls away, till, a serene and senile man, he drops into that cavern men call the tomb, and the world wags on and on as though he had never been born. If his reward is not attained in time, we are sure that in eternity he will receive the welcome plaudit, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant!"

A few more words, and I am done. The Association to which we belong is an honored one, not because of hoary age, but as a sequence of our achievements. It stands second to none belonging to this Commonwealth. It is known as a permanent, practical, and scientific institution. From the

day of its organization the members have followed implicitly the teachings of the Code of Ethics, they have upheld and advocated hygiene and sanitary science, and have cherished and approved the idea of higher medical education. And now we feel, in these times of medical unbelief and dissension, that a more loyal and dignified encouragement and adherence, an occasional renewal of our obligations to the code, the source from which our fathers drew inspiration and enthusiasm, to be the best means of keeping the profession of physic above the "isms" and "pathies" of the age. We have much for which we should be thankful, and I know of nothing better than the prospect before us.

For the accomplishment of greater purposes let each man resolve to contribute his quota to the Society's work. "If we may impute a fault to those who are admirable in all the ordinary work of life, I would suggest how large a quantity of knowledge lies scattered and lost to the scientific world in the charge of those who are in large (country) practice, and who *record* nothing" (Sir Jas. Paget); not even an occasional paper to their home society.

I would suggest that a written report be made to this Association of each interesting case, and let that report show painstaking in its preparation, a bestowal of mental work in its every page, so that any medical periodical in the land would be glad to publish it.

Let us do nothing in "pigglety-wigglety" way, but every thing in decency and order. Let our work during the year of grace 1883 surpass in interest and excellence the years that have gone before. Let no man fail in his appointment, whether it be as leader for debate, as chairman of a committee, or as chairman of one of the sections. Confusion and annoyance have arisen in consequence of such failure on a few occasions. Pride and a higher estimate of our duties must prevail to prevent a future chagrin.

So far as the discussions of this Association are concerned, gentlemanliness has been the unvarying rule. The golden rule has been observed. Not a wave of trouble has come above the surface, and in the future we can not do better than heed the wise teaching of Sir James Paget, who says: "Do not let our disputes be very noisy on the scientific side. Remember always that it is only through clear and undisturbed water that you can see what lies at the bottom. In storms of controversy there is nothing to be found but the billow that moves to mischief and the foam that disappears."